

XV 'T WAS MORE THAN A TRIP TO THE STORE.

In general we tended to see (take in) only the larger aspect, the spacious bodies of water, the rugged fjord-like channels, the snow-capped ridges, the cascading waterfalls, the humour of the skies above, and Neptune's element below. Travelling as we were, ours was not to wander so much into the forest, or to examine every 'nook and cranny'. Yes!, ours was to move on towards some imaginary destination and return - in safety, in order to fulfill some vague, and perhaps vain, ambition.

The weather produced its own enforced dalliance.

Surely one could expend a whole lifetime in the environs of Southeast Alaska and the British Columbia coast, exploring and noting the nuances from place to place, season to season, and year to year. One might even conjecture any one single place would serve as microcosm of the whole. He might even claim as much for his own home.

Despite this pressing-on, we did occasionally wander off to a lake, follow a stream bed, or trail, meander up an abandoned logging road, however un leisurely at times.

We did notice the disappearance of the arbutus shortly after passing into Johnstone Straits. We observed the intense logging activity that had taken place along the water throughout the British Columbia coast. We did not observe where Douglas Fir yields to the dominance of the Sitka Spruce. We seemed always aware of the graceful cedars and the abundance of alder particularly along the water's edge.

We were always able to gather a bouquet of 'wild' flowers which cheered the interior of Atavist on more than one occasion, and which we carefully cradled in their vase in the galley sink as we sailed or hobby-horsed along. Our very first bouquet consisted of pacific serviceberry in its late May bloom, bunchberry and chocolate lily; and in Glacier Bay we gathered one of river beauty, silverweed, Siberian aster, and bluebells of Scotland. All in all we noted close to forty different species of flower-bearing plants in bloom.

And as part of our diet we partook of some half-dozen 'wild' plants; goose tongue, seashore plantain, and beach asparagus regularly, always on the lookout for sorrel to use as a salad green; we experimented with sea lettuce, finding it exceedingly salty; and once we were treated to the delicacy of lambs quarters. On many occasions we discovered red huckleberry and salmon

A Trip To The Store

berry, and, often enough, beach strawberries. On our return trip we kept an eye alerted for the abandoned orchards where we found apples and plums, sometimes in goodly supply; and thereabouts much evidence of the black bear as well, with huge claw marks appearing on the limbs of the apple trees along with conspicuous piles of dung on the ground below.

And of the marine life upon which we depended as a mainstay in our diet, we snared red snapper, ling cod, kelp greenling, several species of 'rock cod'; halibut, starry flounder; even pollock, tomcod, cabezon and herring; Yes!, and 'dogfish' (which we did not eat): then of course: sockeye, silver, chinook and pink salmon; dolly varden, cutthroat trout, and rainbow trout; with shrimp, octopus, abalone, king crab, tanner crab, dungeness and rock crabs whenever these happened along. And truly, we saw, but did not partake of humpbacked whales, killer whales, sea lions and seals. Unfortunately, after May 19th we discontinued the harvesting of bivalve shellfish with the advent of the 'red-tide' warning; however, until then we indulged our palates with fresh oysters, little neck and butter clams. Indeed nature is bountiful, although each measure of bounty requires its own special effort to obtain and prepare.

And last, but not least, in this recounting of the embellishments to the larger wilderness, we had always the company of shore birds and water birds, as well as that king of scavengers, the bald eagle whose white head was easily and frequently detected as its owner sat perched somewhere along the shore above the water. It seemed we were seldom without the 'entertainment' of the kingfisher with its 'gay' chattering flight accompanied by precipitous dives, sometimes snaring a fish too large to engorge all at once, and other times emerging from the sea a wet befuddled disappointment.

Often enough, when we observed a huge congregation of shore birds and diving birds, all circling, and in great agitation over and within a particular area of the water, we would navigate in that direction hoping to snare a salmon; salmon we had assumed were responsible for driving, what we had additionally assumed were, herring into a tight cordoned school, in order to feed easily upon them. As mentioned earlier, in our fish tale, the herring, or anchovies, could as readily have been cordoned by a bevy of diving birds, driving them into what is referred as 'herring balls'. Only once did we believe salmon to be the driving and corralling force, since, when trolling through the agitated congregation of birds, we caught two silvers, the largest of which

KNOTTED TWINE

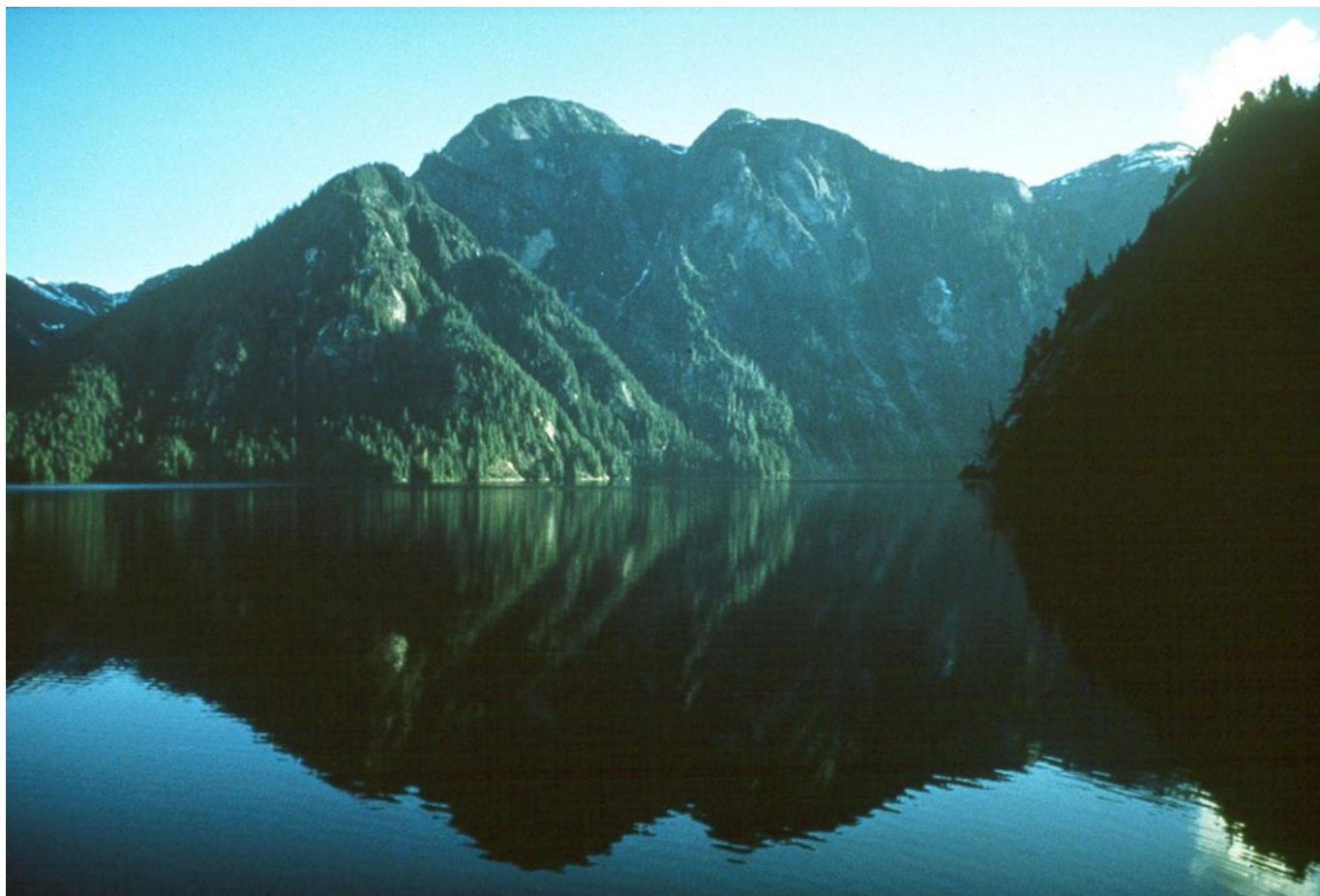
'got away' so unprepared were we to net it under sail. Perhaps the salmon and diving birds (not discounting dog-fish, or mackerel) form a conspiratorial alliance when the occasion demands, which the biologist might refer as symbiosis.



I think it a fair assessment to reiterate we were involved with the larger aspect; ours was not a 'nature' trip per se. In many

A Trip To The Store

ways we were discovering ourselves as much as the world without. Although we chose to travel towards the wilderness, we moved rapidly through the abundant setting, steeped in its immensity.



Often we had wondered how many of the snow-capped ridges had been traversed; however inviting, they seemed distant and formidable. We reasoned: man has surely been there in his lust for riches, perhaps more so than in his lust for beauty and solitude.

Aside from the more obvious logging camps and generally ravished appearance of the hillsides, marking only too plainly man's intrusions into the wilderness, there was many a beach and anchorage strewn with his refuse and abandoned, rusting, and rotting machinery. Eventually the Great Mother will re-engage the hillsides and reclaim the decaying hulks left over from man's winnowings - until another time.

One seldom 'tidies up' after his ravishings.

Despite these latter sights, and despite our unsettling

KNOTTED TWINE

responses, we did not feel the water had become a cesspool as yet; we did not feel a forgiveness however; only the vastness that is masking the effects of these intrusions.

Some even rationalize, as pertaining to the rusting, rotting hulks, they offer shelter for a variety of marine creatures, screening them from the predacious eye of the shore bird, or scavenger; or provide a place for the smaller to escape the larger, and so on. AYE!, Man - the latter-day ecologist!



While these observations caused their share of irritation, it was, and is, our hope that man is after all only an irreverent, irrelevant transience, and the day will come when he will do more than 'subdue the earth'. The thought had occurred to us

A Trip To The Store

that Mars waits in the wings; a one-way ticket; we sighed and hoped.



I feel I must apologize for our lack of any real contact with the indigenous population of the area through which we traveled. We feel, none the less, we ought acknowledge their non-existence in some small way, not to allow ourselves to be outdone by the numerous tourist brochures which almost invariably depict some aspect of their remains in the form of totems, masks, baskets, canoes etc. Ubiquitous they are not, only occasionally to be seen in fish boats, and small runabouts flitting to and from some village we did not feel the presumption to enter. We had been 'warned' that some of the villages did not welcome the paleface. However, we did visit the shambles of their abandoned villages, feeling 'the something lost'. We visited places which preserved their artifacts; veritable mausoleums. We visited museums as we might peer into our own graves, in Prince Rupert, Juneau, Sitka, and Haines, We walked into curio shops, and tourist traps, that made much of Indian heritage and artifacts, arts and crafts, as having some intrinsic value, feeling mostly awkward

KNOTTED TWINE

and ashamed at the palefaced exploitation.



A Trip To The Store



KNOTTED TWINE

The village of Hoonah, Alaska remains the only place I had ventured to contact any one of these descendants of the original America, it having been requested of me as a gesture of friendship from another who visited this individual during the previous year. I'll not dwell on the rather apprehensive and suspicious looks that were engendered in response to my inquiries in my effort to locate this man. Lincoln Wallace, yes, Lincoln (somehow acquiring a bizzarely twisted significance in my mind), Lincoln Wallace brought great credit and dignity to the Tlingit as he would to the whole 'race' of man. I found the man in his seventies grossly deformed and crippled in the hand and foot with arthritis, yet persisting, through need to do, love, will, and several admixtures of perseverences, in making very detailed, interlaced, carefully scribed and etched designs on metal bracelets and metal amulets, preserving the Tlingit symbolic figures of Raven, Bear, Otter, Eagle, Owl, Frog and Geoduck. This he accomplished with simple hand tools while the workpiece was held securely in a small universal vise, manipulating these tools in hands so hampered in appearance one could not help but wonder at the scope of the human will.

Lincoln spoke of the old days before the United States Government expropriated Glacier Bay as a National Park. While, before this remarkable action had taken place, the Tlingit would spend their summers therein gathering mostly gull eggs and berries, as well fishing for salmon and halibut, they were denied entry to the Park once it became an official playground of the Protestant conquerors. Ironically, a most central location within the Bay is called Tlingit Point. Even more than the loss of the Bay, Lincoln feared the loss of the Tlingit culture. So often he saw his people stumble about 'under the influence', without either shame or pride.

Not to dwell upon this sadness, though one ought not dismiss suffering of this kind as irrelevant to himself; I would add we must find a different way, if only to save ourselves.

All in all, our journeying was more than a casual trip to the store. We had entered a world so rich in wonder; the spectacular part of our larger home, Mother Earth; as much to be gleaned as feast for the spirit as repast for the corpus. Ours was all too brief a sojourn; scant are we able to detail the microcosmos, as much to be recalled as promise for the future; to return again and again until we might discover its secrets.

One might imagine an Elysia, a mythological garden, and dare utter such as Paradise or Eden, so eagerly and readily do we succumb to need and desire for enchantment. If enchantment

A Trip To The Store

were real and viable, a rightful occurrence, a joyous happening to be regarded as our due; released then into these surroundings, it all seemed possible. If only, if only our fellow man would ease off, would fain curtail the unsubtle, unfeeling rapacity; tendering his actions with love, love for Mother earth.

One might always find cause to rue the inevitable, but if any creature ever contained the power to gain a beachhead upon his own nature, it is our fellow man; and thus we wish it so.

We abscond with this dalliance of ours, holding it dear to us; some keenness of eye and spirit awakened, ready to trip again.



KNOTTED TWINE

